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WALLACE.

A Poem

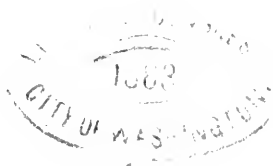
BY

HORATIO WADDINGTON.



CAMBRIDGE

1815.



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A.M. 25 Aug.

WALLACE.

———— in ferrum pro libertate ruebant. VIRG.

THE Sun has sunk behind the dark hill's breast,
His last faint rays have faded from the West :
The Moon has climb'd her watch-tow'rs lonely height,
Her pale lamp's radiance glimm'ring through the night ;
Its chaste cold beams in melancholy pride 5
Pour a sad splendour on the banks of Clyde.
From yon grey cliff a fitful shadow thrown
O'er the clear stream just glances, and is gone :
The trembling dove has sought the copse-wood screen—
But WALLACE pauses o'er the solemn scene. 10
Cold breathes the night air on his manly brow,
Yet burns his cheek with wrath's indignant glow :
No boding rain-drop tells the storm is nigh—
Is it a tear that glistens in his eye?
The Ev'ning breeze has sigh'd itself to rest, 15
But whirlwinds rage within the patriot's breast :
No calm the tide of passion can controul,
No peace can soothe the tempest of the soul.

For look on Nature's fairest holiest hour,
 When Ev'ning gilds yon rose-embosom'd bow'r; 20
 When milder splendours deck the orb of day,
 And gently fade in mellowing tints away;
 When raptur'd Fancy sits, and starts to hear
 Celestial voices murmuring on her ear,
 And say, can this exalt the thinking mind 25
 With thoughts as noble, feelings as refin'd,
 As when great Brutus 'mid his patriot band
 Rais'd the swift vengeance of his red right hand,
 Mann'd his brave heart against his country's foe,
 And hurl'd him headlong to the shades below, 30
 Then sternly smiling wav'd the steel on high,
 The sacred steel that bade a tyrant die?
 True, the still calm of Ev'ning's hour may move
 The softer soul to tenderness and love;
 The hateful links of Slav'ry's chain may bind 35
 The lukewarm feelings of a lowly mind;
 But the dark grandeur of the hero's soul
 Greets the loud storms that war around the pole;
 But Freedom's cause the patriot's heart can charm,
 Steel his firm breast, and nerve his manly arm. 40

And thou, fair Scotland! doom'd, alas! to feel
 A ruthless tyrant's desolating steel,
 Land of the Minstrel! is thy glory fled?
 For ever droops thy sad dejected head?

Land of the Minstrel! will thy tearful eye 45
 Be ever wet with drops of Misery?
 Have Peace and Mercy left thy blood-stain'd shore?
 Will grim Oppression rule for evermore?
 No: there are hearts, which Virtue yet inspires
 With patriot zeal, and warms with patriot fires; 50
 Hearts, that are bright with Freedom's holy flame,
 That vie with Brutus', or with Cato's name.
 I see the glorious years in prospect rise,
 Big with their great and awful destinies;
 On Fate's dark verge I see pale Slav'ry stand, 55
 I see her fall—and fall by Wallace' hand.
 Yes: Wallace' hand shall aim the glorious blow
 That pours his country's vengeance on her foe,
 His arm shall lift her sacred standard high,
 And lead her patriot bands to Victory. 60
 E'en now, as sad he treads the streamlet's side,
 His noble heart swells high with free-born pride;
 E'en now his bosom glows with generous ire;
 And Southron blood must quench that holy fire.
 In life's fair morn, when Hope's delusive ray 65
 Gave the glad promise of as fair a day,
 When all was bright, when every prospect smil'd,
 And guardian Virtue watch'd her favourite child,
 E'en in those hours of mirth, the wondrous boy
 Scorn'd the light play-thing and the idle toy. 70

E'en then in thoughtful mood he joy'd to rove

'Mid ancient Lanark's solitary grove ;

E'en then o'er patriot woe he fondly sigh'd,

And read how Cato liv'd—how Cato died.

Then, when he climb'd yon mountain's topmost height, 75

And threw o'er Scotland's realms his kindling sight,

Spake the bright language of his raptur'd eye—

“How sweet with her to live, for her to die.”

But when his blood in livelier torrents ran,

And the boy-patriot ripen'd into man, 80

No trifler he, to waste the vacant hour

With brainsick ditties in a lady's bow'r ;

But 'gainst th' oppressor's deed, the tyrant's wrong,

His pulse beat high, his ready arm was strong ;

And rash the foe, whose daring could abide 85

The flash that lighten'd from his eye of pride.

Yet think not conscious Virtue had consign'd

To Stoic sternness all his mighty mind ;

In that cold breast one fervid passion glow'd,

Pure as the sacred source from which it flow'd ; 90

That iron heart one tender feeling mov'd—

The great, the brave, the patriot Wallace—lov'd.

But she is gone—the dæmon of the storm

Spared not the tender lily's spotless form ;

She bow'd her head beneath the bleak wind's breath, 95

She shrunk, she wither'd at the touch of Death.

And lives he then in widow'd grief to mourn,
 To sigh for her who never can return,
 To pine away his melancholy years,
 A lonely pilgrim in this vale of tears? 100
 He lives—but not to waste the useless sigh
 That tears his breast with more than agony:
 Enough—a mourning hero's sacred tear
 Has dropped in sorrow on that honour'd bier.
 But Scotland's woes recall a sterner mood; 105
 That tear must vanish in a sea of blood.
 Yes: injured Land! his widow'd heart can see
 Its wife, its infant, die again in thee,
 And oft in restless slumbers of the night
 Their mangled forms appal his aching sight, 110
 Rousing revenge the gory spectres stand,
 Breathe the low groan, and wave the ghastly hand.
 Lov'd shades! ye shall not plead in vain: e'en now
 The storm is gath'ring on the mountain's brow,
 Awhile it slumbers in that silence dread— 115
 Then bursts in thunder on th' Oppressor's head.

Night draws her veil o'er Lanark's dusky hill,
 And clad in deepest darkness all is still,
 Save where the near encampment's outward bound
 Pours on the breeze the changing watch-word's sound, 120
 And the lone warder's measur'd footsteps show
 The sleeping Southron dreads a nightly foe.

What cry was that, that burst upon the gale,
 More loud than owlet's shriek, or bittern's wail?
 'Tis silence all—again that sound of fear 125
 Strikes loud and frequent on the startling ear;
 Southron, awake! 'tis Scotland's slogan cry,
 That calls her sons to Death or Victory.
 Southron, awake! on Lanark's fatal plain
 The Southron robber ne'er shall wake again; 130
 The pibroch's notes his fun'ral knell have rung,
 That slogan yell his fun'ral dirge has sung;
 And oft, as o'er his bones the shepherd sees
 The lonely heather waving in the breeze,
 Kind Memory's pow'r within his breast can raise 135
 The glorious images of other days;
 His rude heart glows with pure Religion's flame,
 And breathes a prayer to Heav'n—with Wallace' name.
 Yes: it was He, that meteor of the night,
 That burst like lightning on their blasted sight, 140
 Whose helm's bright glare, whose claymore's sweepy ray
 Flash'd on their closing eyes a paler day:
 Aye, and that sword shall ne'er know sheath again,
 Till injur'd Scotland spurn a tyrant's reign;
 Till that bright day shall come, as come it must, 145
 When pale Oppression withers in the dust,
 And Freedom rise, since nature first began,
 The seal of Heav'n, the charter'd right of man.

And wouldst thou stop that darkly-rolling wave,
 That sweeps thy trembling legions to the grave? 150
 And wouldst thou quench that beacon's radiant light,
 That gleams a death-fire on their coward sight?
 Go, bid the Sun return, the lightning stay,
 And curb the thunder on his airy way,
 But cross not thou the patriot's onward path, 155
 Nor tempt the fury of his gen'rous wrath
 For, as the cloud by rapid whirlwinds driv'n
 Speeds its dark course along the fields of Heav'n,
 From plain to plain the Scottish standards fly,
 For Wallace leads—and leads to Liberty. 160
 Dumbarton's castled steep has seen them now,
 And now they wave on Stirling's lofty brow;
 And soon, proud Edward, thy unnumber'd band
 Shall fly the vengeance of an injur'd land.
 Such are the spoils thy valiant warriors bring 165
 To grace the trophies of their mighty King!

Grey Cambuskenneth! many a tempest's roar
 Has howl'd in darkness round thy turrets hoar,
 And many a summer's sun has lent his glow
 To gild the honours of that ancient brow; 170
 But sure, since first thy venerable pile
 Or wept or smil'd with Nature's tears or smile,
 Ne'er saw thy tow'rs a day than that more bright,
 When Heav'n and Wallace fought for Scotland's right.

Then sank the foe in Forth's devouring flood, 175
 His bright waves purple with their mingling blood;
 In vain De Warrenne's spotless banner high
 Wav'd o'er the flow'r of England's chivalry;
 Soil'd in the dust that spotless banner lay,
 For Freedom smil'd on Cambuskenneth's day. 180

But turn where sorrowing Scotland once again
 Greets the light steps of Pleasure's airy train;
 Where dove-eyed Peace, and Plenty's bounteous hand
 Shed their soft influence on the smiling land.
 Oh! could the tyrant's iron bosom know 185
 The calm pure joys that from Contentment flow,
 Oh! could he change for Pride's tumultuous hour
 The sweets that lurk beneath a peasant's bow'r,
 Fair Mercy's wreath War's blood-stain'd arm might bind—
 Nor fierce Oppression lord it o'er mankind. 190
 It may not be: glad Eden's heav'nly bloom
 Provok'd the fell destroyer's envious doom;
 And Edward's guilty heart has sworn to shed
 His impious wrath on injur'd Scotland's head.
 The ruthless warrior comes, and in his train 195
 Ten thousand squadrons load the groaning plain;
 There where his war-horse' fiery hoofs resound,
 No blossom springs, no verdure marks the ground;
 And still where'er his thronging legions press,
 Grooms round their path a reeking wilderness 200

Yet know, proud King, in peril's darkest hour
 The patriot Wallace scorns a tyrant's pow'r—
 The storm may rage, the wintry blast beat high;
 Hope's sunshine cheers his calm, undaunted eye:
 In Freedom's name he bids the pibroch sound, 205
 That calls his thin, but fearless bands around;
 In Freedom's name he lifts his mighty arm,
 And greets the trumpet of his last alarm.

When Ev'ning sank on Falkirk's dreary heath,
 More desp'rate grew the dark'ning strife of Death; 210
 For still unmov'd in firmest circle stood
 The Scottish spears' impenetrable wood.
 But thick and fatal 'gainst that noble few
 The Southron shafts in headlong vollies flew;
 And swift as lightning's flash, or shot-star's flame, 215
 On wings of speed the charging squadrons came.
 Yet nor the arrow's flight, nor horseman's sweep
 Could break the phalanx of that circle deep,
 Till coward Treachery rais'd his murd'rous hand,
 And pierc'd the bosom of his native land. 220
 Yes: though she sing the patriot's deathless fame,
 Th' indignant Muse must pause on Comyn's name,
 Must curse the Scot with Scotland's life-blood dyed,
 Th' ungrateful son, the trait'rous parricide.
 And do they shrink? the waning thunder's shock 225
 Has burst the bulwark of that iron rock—

Heard ye the conq'ring shout of England there?
 The cries of wrath, the murmurs of despair!
 Death's giant form, and Murder's ruthless train
 With strides colossal stalk th' ensanguin'd plain: 230
 So fierce the din, so dark the gloomy strife,
 So fell the rage that gives not, takes not life,
 That ye might think the spirits of the brave
 Had left the peaceful mansions of the grave,
 Sought the wild scenes they lov'd in life so well, 235
 Fill'd the loud shout, and swell'd the dæmon yell.

Yet 'mid the horrors of that dismal night,
 One star yet beams with calm and tranquil light,
 One dauntless breast is there, whose patriot fire
 Nor chills with fear, nor flames with maddening ire; 240
 Serene and fearless, mid opposing spears,
 His godlike front th' intrepid warrior rears;
 By each endearing name, each tender tie,
 He calls his bands to strike for Liberty.
 Shall Wallace call in vain! alas! no more 245
 His voice shall rouse them to the battle's roar:
 Cold, cold they lie in icy slumber bound,
 Nor hear that lov'd, that spirit-stirring sound;
 Like morning's dream their patriot might is gone,
 And Wallace stands 'mid conquering hosts alone. 250
 He looks around—not years of earthly bliss
 Can pay the feelings of an hour like this;

Near and more near th' exulting legions press—

He stands in gloomy silent loneliness.

There is a stillness in his up-rai'd eye, 255

A calm, that seems to mock at agony ;

There is a firmness in his tranquil air,

Too still for wrath, too placid for despair ;

That nameless feeling in the hero's mind

Shews the still sadness of a soul resign'd, 260

Dead to each joy this anxious being gives ;

The patriot yet will live while Scotland lives ;

Though no proud laurels deck his vanquish'd head,

Though wav'ring Fortune's fickle smile is fled,

He lives for Scotland still—at utmost need 265

Swift as the wind he mounts his warrior steed,

And spurring onward through the closing night,

Speeds o'er the heath his late and desperate flight.

Still as o'er Falkirk's blood-stain'd heath he pass'd,

The following tumult echoed in the blast ; 270

But when he reach'd the Carron's distant side,

The hostile shouts in fainter murmurs died.

Through dashing spray, through eddying waters' roar,

With venturous plunge he gains th' opposing shore,

And joys to think that friendship's cheering ray 275

Will light the warrior on his lonely way :

Suspicion—doubt—a hero knows not you—

And sure the brave Monteith was ever true :

His bounteous hand the festive board shall spread,
 His bounteous roof shall shelter Wallace' head. 280

In that dread hour of that tremendous day,
 When Earth shall ope, and trembling yield her prey,
 When pallid Guilt, and self-accusing Fear
 At Heav'n's august tribunal shall appear,
 Each conscious spirit in that holy place 285
 May smile with joy, and glow with heav'nly grace;
 But still one soul shall hope no mercy there,
 One soul shall pine in comfortless despair,
 One guilty wretch fear's darkest pang shall rend—
 Ask ye his crime? he was a faithless friend. 290

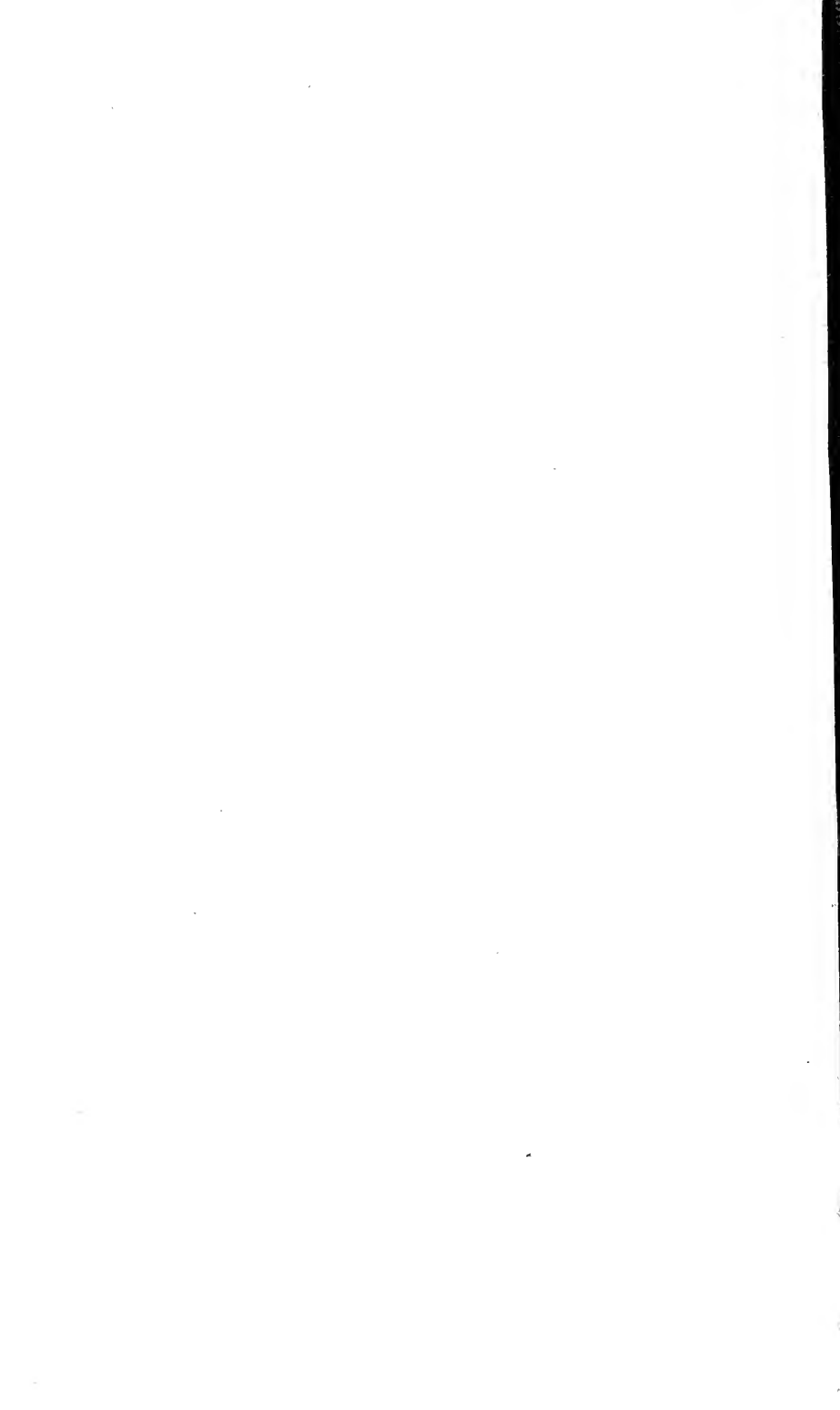
Yes: it was he—that treacherous slave, who sold
 A patriot's sacred life for Edward's gold.
 Led by his hand the coward ruffians crept,
 And bound th' unconscious warrior as he slept:
 Then set that star, that cheer'd the world before; 295
 In deepest night it set—to rise no more.

The midnight bell has toll'd: in sullen sweep
 Its echoes float around the dungeon keep,
 But wake not him, who lost in slumber lies,
 Nor heeds the morrow's fearful sacrifice. 300
 Through the high casement thrown, the pale moon-beam
 Flings o'er the narrow cell its scanty gleam;
 That silver light in mildest lustre shows
 The hero's sleep, the patriot's calm repose.

No turbid passion breaks that tranquil air, 305
 For all is placid, all is heav'nly there,
 And ye might think, but for that stilly breath,
 His form had felt the soft'ning touch of death.
 But see! he waves his hand—a rapturous smile
 Steals gently o'er his godlike face the while, 310
 As if some sainted spirit hovering near
 Pour'd sounds ethereal on his charmed ear;
 Told the bright blessings of celestial love,
 And call'd her Wallace to the realms above.
 He comes: some throbs of anguish yet remain, 315
 Some few short pangs of momentary pain,
 Then soars his soul on pinions wide unfurl'd,
 To plead for Scotland in a better world.







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